

In the Claims:

1. A method of forming a single, separately identifiable bundle from a plurality of adjacent articles, each bearing product information or advertising indicia, while substantially obscuring an individual identification code on a common surface of each of the articles, such as to prevent an automated scanner from fully reading the codes, comprising:

at least partially wrapping the articles to form the bundle such that the product information or advertising indicia on at least one article is at least partially viewable while substantially obscuring the individual identification codes on each of the articles,

whereby the articles in the bundle may be identified from the product information or advertising indicia on the at least one article, but the obscuring prevents the automated scanner from reading the individual identification codes and identifying the bundle as a single article.

2. The method according to claim 1, wherein the obscuring is accomplished by placing a relatively thin piece of a paperboard or cardboard material capable of obscuring the individual identification codes adjacent to the common surfaces of the articles bearing the individual identification codes, and the wrapping step includes placing a first film entirely around the plurality of articles and the paperboard or cardboard.

3. The method according to claim 2, wherein the first film is selected from the group consisting of polypropylene film, polyethylene film, polyolefin film, polyvinyl chloride film, and cellophane, and further including: (a) shrinking the first film to substantially secure the articles in the bundle against movement relative to each other; and (b) applying a bundle identification code to the bundle once formed.

4. The method of claim 1, wherein the wrapping step includes placing a first film entirely around the plurality of articles and the obscuring is accomplished by attaching a label to the first film over the common surfaces of the articles, the label having at least one relatively dark, patterned or opaque surface or layer and bearing a bundle identification code, whereby the dark, patterned or opaque surface or layer prevents the automated scanner from reading the individual identification codes.

5. The method of claim 4, wherein the label is self-adhesive and includes a backing, the dark, patterned or opaque surface or layer of the label being capable of obscuring the individual identification codes and positioned adjacent to the backing, the bundle identification code being provided on an exterior surface of the label.

6. The method of claim 1, wherein the wrapping step includes placing a first film only partially around the plurality of articles and the obscuring is accomplished by wrapping a second dark-colored, opaque, or

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5 one of the articles exposed for viewing.

12. The method of claim 11, wherein the obscuring of the individual identification codes is accomplished by placing a label having a dark, patterned or opaque surface or layer capable of obscuring the individual identification codes on the film sleeve or band after shrinking.

13. The method of claim 11, wherein the obscuring of the individual identification codes is accomplished by positioning a substantially thin piece of paperboard or cardboard capable of obscuring the individual identification codes adjacent to the articles before shrinking the film sleeve or band.

14. The method of claim 11, wherein the step of obscuring the individual identification codes is accomplished by providing at least a portion of the film sleeve or band with a dark coloring, pattern or opaqueness that prevents an automated scanner from reading the individual identification codes through the sleeve.

15. The method of claim 11, wherein the viewing of the product information or advertising indicia and the obscuring are simultaneously accomplished by providing the film sleeve or band with a pattern that prevents a scanner from fully reading the individual information codes, but allows for the product information or advertising indicia to be visualized or perceived.

16. The method of claim 11, wherein the film sleeve is formed of polyvinyl chloride.

17. The method of claim 1, wherein the wrapping step comprises placing a film having a pattern entirely around the articles, wherein the pattern allows an observer to perceive the advertising indicia or product information, but prevents the reading of the individual identification codes on the articles.

18. A method of forming a single, separately identifiable bundle from a plurality of adjacent articles forming a group while substantially obscuring an individual identification code on a surface of each of the articles, such as to prevent an automatic scanner from fully reading the code, comprising:

placing a first film at least partially over the group of articles, the first film at least partially exposing at least one surface of one of the articles for viewing;

placing a second film at least partially over the group of articles, the second film substantially obscuring the identification code on another surface of each article;

at least partially securing the first film to the second film on at least two sides of the group of articles to form a sleeve; and

shrinking the sleeve to form the bundle.

19. The method according to claim 18, wherein the first film is a

clear, transparent film and the second film is a colored, opaque, or patterned film capable of obscuring the individual identification codes.

20. The method according to claim 19, wherein:

the first and second films are comprise polyethylene films fed from continuous rolls, and

5 securing the first film to the second film includes forming a first seal from the loose ends of the first and second films before the placing steps, and then using a heated device or cutter for simultaneously severing the first and second films from the continuous roll and forming a second seal adjacent a second side of the bundle after the placing steps.

21. The method according to claim 18, wherein the step of placing the films includes advancing a first group of a plurality of articles into a first seal formed between the free ends of the first and second films and then forming a second seal adjacent behind the group of articles, wherein the
5 formation of the second seal forms a new first seal for a next-in-line group of articles to be bundled.

22. The method according to claim 18, wherein shrinking the sleeve to form the bundle includes initially heating and cooling the sleeve.

23. The method according to claim 18, further including the step of placing an identification code on the bundle, the code identifying at least the

from reading the individual product codes on the articles.

27. The assembly according to claim 26, wherein the first and second films are selected from the group consisting of polyvinyl chloride films, polyolefin films, polypropylene films, polyethylene films, cellophane, and combinations thereof.

28. The assembly according to claim 26, wherein the film is comprised of a single sleeve or band open at both ends, the film sleeve or band being at least partially opaque, colored, or patterned to prevent a scanner from reading the individual identification codes on the articles.

29. The assembly according to claim 26, wherein the film completely covers the articles and is provided with a pattern that allows an observer to discern the advertising indicia or product information while preventing the scanning of the individual identification codes.

30. The assembly according to claim 26, further including a label having a bundle identification code for identifying the group of articles on the sleeve.

31. A method of repackaging a plurality of articles, each bearing advertising indicia or product information and an individual identification code on a common surface or side, taken from a shipping container into one

or more separately identifiable bundles, comprising:

- 5 (a) bundling at least two of the articles together using a film such that advertising indicia or product information on at least one of the articles is at least partially viewable but the identification codes on each of the articles are substantially obscured;
- (b) applying a bundle identification code for identifying a
10 characteristic of the bundled articles to the film; and
- (c) returning the bundle to the shipping container.

32. The method according to claim 31, including repeating steps (a)-(c) for all the articles in the shipping container.

33. The method according to claim 31, wherein bundling at least two of the articles together includes wrapping the film entirely around the plurality of articles and the bundle identification code is provided on an exterior surface of a label having a relatively dark, patterned or opaque
5 surface or layer attached to the film adjacent to the common surfaces or sides of the articles bearing the individual identification codes, whereby the dark, patterned or opaque surface or layer prevents an automated scanner from fully reading the individual identification codes.

34. The method according to claim 31, wherein the bundling step includes positioning a relatively thin piece of cardboard or paperboard capable of obscuring the individual identification codes adjacent to the common

5 surfaces or sides of the articles bearing the individual identification codes and
either placing a film sleeve or band over the articles and the cardboard or
paperboard, or wrapping the film around the plurality of articles and the
cardboard or paperboard.

35. The method according to claim 32, wherein the film is a first
film, and bundling the at least two articles includes:

5 placing the first film at least partially over the articles, the first
film at least partially exposing at least one surface of each of the articles for
viewing;

placing a second film at least partially over the articles, the
second film substantially obscuring the identification code on another surface
of each article;

10 securing the first film to the second film at two locations to form
a sleeve.